THE WAR POTENTIAL OF NATIONS. By Klaus Knorr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 310)

This book was written by a distinguished political scientist as a contribution to the theory of war potential, the measurement of which he considers to be an important task even in a nuclear age. The military strength of a nation is composed of two prime elements: forces in being, both men and material, and the potential capacity to provide additional quantities of military manpower and equipment in a mobilization build-up or in wartime. Professor Knorr is concerned entirely with this potential capacity, a subject of basic importance in intelligence estimation.

Potential military power, the author states, is a combination of three determinants: the will to fight (morale), administrative ability (primarily governmental planning and programming competence in wartime), and economic capacity. This book represents the first general attempt to show how these determinants interact. As such, it is an interesting, informative, and useful contribution. It is a product of extensive and thorough research in a number of disciplines -- political science, sociology, psychology, history, and economics. Professor Knorr's main argument -- namely, that there is a great deal more to the measurement of war potential than economic factors -- is beyond dispute.

At the same time, the reviewer is struck by the difficulties of integrating the numerous variables pertinent to the analysis.

The economic variables are treated thoroughly. The familiar categories of gross national product, structure of the population, and foreign trade are set out clearly and in detail. Furthermore, the critical point of flexibility in the economy and its relation to maximum war potential is put in needed perspective. However, after the ordering of the factors affecting the will to fight and administrative capacity, the reviewer is baffled as to how these factors can be measured and integrated with each other and with the more traditional economic elements. Professor Knorr does not propose the felicific calculus which would do the job. He limits himself primarily to identification and appraisal. He believes, however, that the techniques of integrated analysis can be developed over a period of time. And perhaps he is correct.

But the real question is, how useful would such an effort be, granting the possibility of success, in an age of intercontinental ballistic missiles with hydrogen warheads? The author is fully aware of such criticism. He recognizes that war potential may be of no particular significance in an all-out nuclear exchange. He also admits that in the "brushfire" type of war, where neither contestant mobilizes more than a fraction of his potential capability, more precise measurement is not needed. He argues, however, that between these two extremes there is a range of other types of conceivable, and indeed likely, conflicts where the traditional measurement of war potential would be important.

Why does he consider wars of attrition, similar to World War I and World War II, to be a "major contingency?" His answer -- because of the possibility that the two antagonists. capable of inflicting near total nuclear destruction on each other, may refrain from using it, except as an act of "utter despair." This is, of course, the familiar concept of the atomic stalemate, and this is the concept which must be examined.

To this reviewer, a true atomic stalemate can exist only under a very special set of circumstances which probably can persist for only a short period of time and which may not in fact ever exist. There are two essential elements for a stalemate: (1) the possession by both antagonists of a massive nuclear delivery capability and (2) the inability of either antagonist to cripple seriously the delivery capability of the other. In sum, the stalemate exists only so long as neither side can be sure that massive nuclear attack will not bring heavy retaliation in kind. Much of what has been popularly written about the so-called atomic stalemate has been confused with the unwillingness of the United States to engage in an offensive (or preventive) war against the Soviet Union. But this unwillingness has nothing to do with military capability, particularly when one considers the military value of the first attack under conditions of surprise.

If the Soviet Union were able to neutralize the delivery of capability of the United States by using conventional jet aircraft

or missiles, a true stalemate would not exist. For if our remaining weaponry were sufficient only to inflict a few million casualties against an alerted Soviet air defense, peace would hang by a slender thread indeed. In the 1930's the Kremlin leadership was willing to pay the price of a few million casualties to collectivize agriculture. When the stakes are world domination, this cost could seem very cheap.

This point, then, is the thrust of my disagreement with Professor Knorr -- the belief that a nuclear stalemate or near statement has been brought about or that if it is brought about, it is likely to continue for any appreciable historical period of time. For a stalemate would not be a point of equilibrium. The one certain fact about military technology is that it changes, and in the postwar period it has changed very rapidly indeed. If this judgment is correct, then nuclear warfare is not a remote possibility, but a distinct probability, should war break out.

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